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TAGS: PGOV, PREL, US, RP
SUBJECT: PHILIPPINES: FEBRUARY 16 NYT CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ
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1. IN A LONG OP-ED PIECE IN THE FEBRUARY 16 NEW YORK TIMES, CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ DESCRIBED RECENT EVENTS AND PRESCRIBED HIS APPROACH TO THE PHILIPPINE SITUATION. HIS ARTICLE SETS THE STAGE FOR HIS HEARING ON THE PHILIPPINES ON FEBRUARY 20. BALANCE OF OP-ED PIECE DEALING WITH HIS APPROACH FOLLOWS IN PARA 2.

2. BEGIN TEXT. THE CHANGEDOVER FROM DICTATORSHIP TO DEMOCRACY HAS WORKED WELL IN SPAIN, PORTUGAL, ARGENTINA AND BRAZIL - AND THERE IS NO REASON IT CANNOT SUCCEED IN THE PHILIPPINES. IN SOME COUNTRIES, TO BE SURE, THERE IS NO DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE. BUT THE PHILIPPINES IS NOT AMONG THEM. BACKED BY THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY, A SUBSTANTIAL MIDDLE CLASS AND MILLIONS OF IMPOVERISHED FILIPINOS, THE DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION HAS THE CREDIBILITY AND CAPACITY TO GOVERN THE COUNTRY.

WHAT SHOULD THE UNITED STATES DO? IF WE CONTINUE TO CONDUCT BUSINESS AS USUAL WITH THE MARCOS REGIME, WE RUN THE RISK OF TYING OURSELVES TO A DOOMED AND DISCREDITED DICTATORSHIP. BUT IF WE COMPLETELY DISSOCIATE OURSELVES FROM IT, WE ARE LIKELY TO FURTHER WEAKEN AN ALREADY FALTERING GOVERNMENT, THEREBY UNDERMINING ITS CAPACITY TO COUNTER THE GROWING COMMUNIST CHALLENGE.

WHATEVER WE DO, THERE ARE REAL RISKS FOR THE UNITED STATES. BUT WE WOULD SURELY BE IN A BETTER POSITION TO PROTECT OUR STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND PROMOTE OUR POLITICAL VALUES BY DISTANCING OURSELVES FROM, RATHER THAN EMBRACING, THE MARCOS REGIME. IT AVAILS US LITTLE TO CONTINUE AIDING A GOVERNMENT THAT HAS LOST ITS LEGITIMACY AND REFUSES TO REFORM.

RHETORICAL DENUNCIATIONS OF ELECTORAL FRAUD ARE NOT, BY THEMSELVES, ENOUGH. TO CONVINCE THE FILIPINO PEOPLE OF OUR GOOD WILL, WE MAY HAVE TO ELIMINATE OUR AID PROGRAM ENTIRELY OR PLACE THE BULK OF IT IN AN ESCROW ACCOUNT, TO

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BE RELEASED ONLY WITH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT THAT COMMANDS THE SUPPORT OF THE FILIPINO PEOPLE. TO THE EXTENT THAT WE CHOOSE TO CONTINUE OUR HUMANITARIAN AID PROGRAMS FOR DESPERATELY POOR FILIPINOS, WE SHOULD CHANNEL THEM THROUGH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND OTHER PRIVATE VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS.

SUCH AN APPROACH WOULD SEND A POWERFUL MESSAGE TO THE RULING ELITE IN THE PHILIPPINES THAT THE UNITED STATES HAS DECIDED TO WITHDRAW ITS SUPPORT FOR A GOVERNMENT WHOSE DAYS ARE CLEARLY NUMBERED. IT IS HIS FEAR OF PRECISELY SUCH A POSSIBILITY THAT HAS LED MR. MARCOS TO SPEND SO MUCH TIME PLEADING HIS CASE ON AMERICAN TELEVISION THIS MONTH. EVEN IF IT DID NOT LEAD TO THE IMMINENT REMOVAL OR RESIGNATION OF MR. MARCOS, WITHDRAWING AMERICAN SUPPORT WOULD STILL SERVE OUR LONGER-TERM INTERESTS BY DEMONSTRATING TO THE FILIPINO PEOPLE THAT WE ARE ON THE SIDE OF DEMOCRACY RATHER THAN DICTATORSHIP.

SOME WILL ARGUE THAT SUCH A POLICY - WHICH THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT MAY INTERPRET AS A BREACH OF OUR SECURITY AGREEMENT - COULD JEOPARDIZE OUR ACCESS TO THE MILITARY FACILITIES AT CLARK FIELD AND SUBIC BAY. WHAT SUCH PEOPLE DO NOT REALIZE IS THAT THE GOOD WILL OF THE FILIPINO PEOPLE IS A NECESSARY CONDITION FOR OUR CONTINUED ACCESS TO THE BASES. IN FACT, IT WOULD PROBABLY COMPROMISE THE FUTURE OF THE BASES EVEN MORE IF WE IMPLICITLY ACQUIESCE IN A FRAUDULENT ELECTION.

ONE OF OUR MAJOR ASSETS IN THE PHILIPPINES IS THE CONTINUING FRIENDSHIP OF THE FILIPINO PEOPLE. TO CONTINUE, IN THE WAKE OF A STOLEN ELECTION, TO PROVIDE THE MARCOS REGIME WITH DOLS 250 MILLION A YEAR IN UNCONDITIONAL MILITARY AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, IS TO RUN THE RISK OF DRYING UP THIS GOOD WILL AND TRANSFORMING IT INTO ENDURING BITTERNESS. THAT WOULD SERVE NEITHER OUR INTERESTS NOR OUR IDEALS. END TEXT. ARMACOST
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